

OSCAR SAVES THE UNION by James Norman

fantastic

SEPTEMBER
20c

ADVENTURES



The
LIQUID MAN
By **BERNARD C. GILFORD**

Fantastic

ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3
NO. 7

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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, illustrating a scene in "The Liquid Man."

Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, Magarian.

Cartoons by Bob Glueckstein, R. Newman.

William B. Ziff, Publisher;
B. G. Davis, Editor

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ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor;
Herman R. Bollin, Art Director.

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FANTASTIC
ADVENTURES
SEPTEMBER,
1941

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 608 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. New York office 270 Madison Avenue. Entered as second class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription \$2.40 a year (12 issues); Canada, \$2.90; Foreign, \$3.40. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

VOLUME 3
NUMBER 7

OSCAR *Saves*

by James Norman

An Indian uprising dangerous? While everybody laughed, Oscar used his sensitive nose, and it told him of an incredible danger to America...

SOMEONE in the crowd gasped as Hodar the Magician leveled his .32 revolver dead at my chest. Then Arizona sunlight flashed upon the barrel as the gun kicked up. A steel-jacketed bullet jarred against my body, rocked me a little and ricocheted harmlessly into the dry red dust.

"There's the proof," said Hodar. "The most incredible phenomenon in America today. Oscar, the little Martian detective, is absolutely bullet proof. Nothing less than an anti-tank shell can harm him. You just can't kill him. And Oscar is the only bona fide Martian on Earth. He came here accidentally and inexplicably—Yes, I pulled him from a top hat in one of my shows in New York. Scientists are still puzzling over his appearance."

Added gasps of astonishment came from the mixed group of cowboys and city folks who had come to the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch annual rodeo. A cowboy, hunched upon the top bar of the corral fence, squinted at me, then squirted a jet of brown tobacco juice at my feet, saying:

"Whall, I'll be dad gummed!"

I jerked myself to my full height of



Oscar swung down hard with the rifle, and the Indian went down with a yell of pain

The Union



four feet five inches and strutted around, looking more dapper than ever. I guess to a cowboy I was a pretty surprising little fellow. I'm so stubby that if you haven't seen a penguin, you'd think I looked like a salt shaker—slim at the top, bunchy at the bottom.

My clothes are made of feathers; black tails, white vest and front, like an evening suit—and I can take them off. But right now, instead of wearing my usual Earth-made silk top hat, I sported a ten gallon sombrero that sort of sagged over my conical ears.

As usual, it was my nose that startled the lean, slow talking cowboy on the fence. It's tulip shaped with a pert sort of flare at the end resembling the horns used in a public address system. The rest of my face is ordinary save for the fact that my skin is an outrageous shade of salmon pink.

Normally I wouldn't be exhibiting myself in such a manner for I am a professional detective—the only Martian detective on Earth or Mars. Hodar and I had stopped at the Sugar Creek spread while touring the West and Tom Tabor, the owner, prevailed upon us to give an impromptu show.

The spectators around the corral were still somewhat dubious about our act. A squat gent packing iron-gray handlebar moustachios and a pair of .44's ambled alongside of Hodar, shaking his head doubtfully. He was Sheriff Stockton from Caxton town.

"Maybe thet were a fake slug in thet pint sized gun of yourn," he said to Hodar. "Mind if I try my own irons?"

Hodar nodded as the peace officer slid out his bone handled six shooter.

"Go to it," Hodar grinned. "Oscar eats lead. But take care that you don't hit his tulip nose. It's very delicate. Perhaps later on Oscar will tell you why his nose is so valuable."

Just then I had trouble with my nose.

I had backed some thirty feet from the corral fence and stood stiffly, my extremely dense Martian skin prepared to take the hammering blow of the .44. Suddenly a horsefly landed on my nose—but that wasn't all!

From the corner of my eye I saw Sheriff Stockton finger the trigger of his gun. At the same instant the horsefly bit me. A split second later the lean cowboy sitting on the corral fence also went into action. His gun was out and roaring from the hip. A bullet zinged past my cheek, clipping off the fly as neatly as William Tell could split an apple.

SHERIFF STOCKTON whirled, his unfired six shooter held tensely in his fist. He stared suspiciously at the lean cowboy as the latter casually blew the smoke out of his gun barrel. Others in the corral stared at the towheaded sharpshooter in frank admiration.

"Who be you?" Stockton demanded.

The stranger glanced at the sheriff thoughtfully, his quick keen gray eyes measuring the law man.

"Some call me the Colorado Kid," he finally drawled. "That's cuz I come from up Colorado way. You're Stockton ain't you?"

The sheriff nodded.

"I been looking for you. Maybe you've got some information I'm wanting," said the Colorado Kid.

"Like w-w—"

A thin hissing sound cut across the corral—barely audible. The sheriff jerked stiffly. His body half turned; the six shooter dropped from his fingers. The unfinished question froze upon his lips as he crumbled to the earth and lay there face down. *A feathered arrow protruded stiffly from his back!*

A sharp intake of breath, then a gasp of bewildered shock swept through the small audience gathered in the corral.

A woman near Hodar screamed and fainted. A half dozen punchers ran to the sheriff's side. The Colorado Kid yelled at one of them, "Git over to the barn and collar him that shot that arrow!" He punctuated the order with a swipe from his high heeled boot.

"Stand back!" Hodar shouted to the others. "Let Oscar handle this. The Sheriff has been murdered!"

Although there was a great deal of confusion in the corral, I soon succeeded in establishing a semblance of order. My experience in handling on-the-spot murder situations stood me in good stead.*

It was but a moment's work to withdraw the arrow from the murdered sheriff's back. I sniffed the barb with my sensitive tulip nose, carefully tabulating the odors. Then I felt my own flesh crawl because of what my nose told me.

"Poison!" I snapped. "*Venom crotali confluenti*, the venom of a prairie rattlesnake. It works in an instant. Much faster than the diamond or timber rattlesnake venom."

"Poisoned arrows!" Hodar cried. "Good God!"

Tom Tabor, the broad shouldered heavy jowled owner of the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch, grabbed the death arrow from my hand and examined it.

"Hopi Indians," Tabor grunted. "And they use prairie rattlers for their snake dance. The reservation isn't far from here . . . But I don't see Hopis bothering to pay off a grudge against Stockton with arrows when guns are so handy. Indians just don't use arrows anymore."

The puncher who had been sent off to search the ranch yard quickly returned. "Can't find nobody," he said.

"Tabor," I said, turning to the ranch owner, "See that no one leaves here until we clear this up."

I had barely given the order when the Colorado Kid whirled upon us, covering the corral with twin guns.

"Nobody's leaving but the Colorado Kid," he drawled. "I've got reasons."

He backed away toward the corral gate, his keen eyes watching every hand that itched toward a holster. In an instant he swung into the saddle of a jet black colt.

The horse suddenly reared, thrashing sunlight with his forelegs. Four iron shod feet hit the ground at once and the Kid and his jet black colt were high-tailing it in a cloud of red dust.

"Greco!" Tabor yelled at a swarthy Mexican hand near him, "Get after him—dead or alive!"

THERE was a sudden scream just as Greco galloped off after the Colorado Kid. I saw a slim, red-haired girl who wore western riding boots and spurs run across the corral, then suddenly stop before the body of Sheriff Stockton. She knelt there for an instant—stunned!

Tom Tabor placed his arm protectively around her shoulder and drew her away from the death scene.

"I'm sorry, Alice," he said gruffly. "There's nothing we can do now. Your father is dead. Brace up, kid."

The girl bit her lip, holding back her emotions. "But why—why did they kill dad?" she cried.

"We'll find out," said Tabor. The ranch owner turned to Hodar, saying, "Will you take Alice into the house. See that she's comfortable. I'll call you when Greco brings back the Colorado Kid."

I trailed Hodar and the girl into the ranch house and as we sat before the fireplace I was impressed with the fact

* "Oscar, Detective of Mars," FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, October 1940.—Ed.

that western girls are like no other women on Earth. Alice Stockton, pretty in an Earthian way, stood out in my eyes because of her straightforward courage and composure.

I overlooked the fact that her nose was straight instead of tulip shaped because her anger over the sheriff's death outshadowed such minor feminine shortcomings.

"Alice," I said, "Out there in the corral you seemed to think someone was after your father? You asked—*why did they kill him?* Why?"

The girl flashed me a blue eyed glance. "I know someone wanted to kill father."

"But who?" I asked.

"I don't know," Alice replied. "Dad has been acting strangely for the past week. He wasn't himself. Last Tuesday he found some mysterious papers but he wouldn't tell me what they contained. He was terribly secretive about them."

"You haven't got any idea at all about them?" Hodar interrupted.

The girl stared into the crackling fireplace. She shook her head helplessly.

"This morning Dad rode out to the Hopi Reservation. When he came back he was as white as a sheet, but he wouldn't tell me what was wrong. I could see that something terrible had happened because it takes a lot to scare Dad. He telegraphed the Governor to come to Caxton immediately."

"The Governor—" said Hodar.

"Yes," Alice answered. "And immediately afterward Dad saddled up and rode off to the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch. He said there might be somebody here he had to talk with."

I leaped out of my chair and began pacing the floor before the fireplace. A crime with complications such as this always excites my Martian nerves.

"Who was he to see?" I asked sud-

denly. "The Colorado Kid?"

Alice shook her head. "I don't know who he is."

"Tabor?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," said Alice.

"What do you know about Tabor? Greco? The others around here?" I demanded, pursuing another track.

"Tom Tabor—you don't think—" Alice looked shocked.

I dusted my feathered sleeve and shot the girl a reassuring glance.

"No. I think Tabor is all right. I sort of like him. Big bluff westerner."

"Tom Tabor has been a close friend of my father for years. He runs this dude ranch as a hobby because he likes to meet people from all different sections of the country. But he owns big cattle spreads all over Arizona," said Alice.

"And Greco?" I asked.

"He's just one of the hands. A Mexican. I don't like him but Dad and Tom Tabor trust him."

"Yes, maybe too much," I answered thoughtfully.

Alice was on the verge of speaking again when suddenly I raced for the door. The sound of hoof beats rounding the barn and making toward the corral thundered in the dry air. I saw a party of three, the Colorado Kid, Greco and an Indian riding, as the westerners quaintly call it, hell bent for leather.

The Kid swung from his saddle and hurried toward Tom Tabor just as Hodar and I arrived upon the scene.

"Better git a guard posted," The Kid clipped. "Indian troubles."

"Indians!" Tabor answered incredibly. "You're crazy! Them Indians have been onto the reservation for nigh on thutty years. They ain't making no trouble."

The Colorado Kid's gray eyes seemed

to harden into diamond points.

"Put them guards on," he spoke slowly and impressively. "The Indians have left the reservation. Not a one left there. *They've vanished!*"

"Vanished—!"

"Massacre too!" The Kid's voice hardened. "They've massacred all the government employees at the reservation! Not a one left alive."

CHAPTER II

Hodar the Killer

TABOR glanced sharply at the young Indian brave who had ridden in with the Colorado Kid and Greco. The young Indian looked excited, sharing the confusion that ran rampant in the ranch corral.

"What do you know about this?" Tabor demanded.

"I am Bill Running Wind," the Indian answered without dismounting from his pony. "I know nothing about massacre. All I know is that Sheriff Stockton soon be dead unless I come here."

"Dead!" Tabor roared. "He is dead!"

A crowd of cowboys, townsmen from Caxton who had come to the rodeo and a handfull of dudes gathered around the Indian's mount. An angry undertone of talk seethed through that crowd. Someone started it with the word, *mas-sacre*, then, *lynch*. Hugh Edwards, the blacksmith from Caxton, appeared with a huge bull whip, long and viciously thin. Then someone uncoiled a rope and fashioned a hangman's knot.

"Lynch the Injun!" Edwards spat. "We'll teach them Hopis a lesson. Lynch 'im!"

New voices repeated the angry cry. The mob surged toward the Indian's pony. Someone grabbed the young

brave's leg and jerked him to the ground. Then Edward's bull whip cut a hissing course through the air.

"Lynch?" I looked at Hodar. This was a completely new experience for me. In my ten months on the Earthian planet I had spent much of my time in centers such as New York and Washington; not once had I noticed men indulge in an activity called *lynch*. Was it yet another facet of American civilization that I must study?

"Good God," Hodar shouted. "They can't lynch him."

Men swarmed around the helpless Indian. Then the Colorado Kid came to his side, whipping out his twin ivory handled guns almost as if they were appendages to his hands. "This Indian is innocent," the Kid yelled.

"Look out!" I shouted.

My cry of warning came too late. Greco had slipped behind the Kid to smash the butt end of his revolver down on the cowboy's skull with a sickening thud. The Kid staggered forward dizzily and was shoved aside by the crowd.

I glanced at Tabor. He stood on the edge of the crowd, shaking his head. "You can't stop 'em now," he said. "The boys are blood wild. Can't blame 'em entirely."

The young Indian brave was yanked away toward the barn. He wore an absolute poker face but in his eyes I could see a look of incredible bewilderment touched with horror. His body stiffened as a rope went sailing over a joist jutting from the barn and one of the men hung the noose around his neck.

"Hodar!" I shouted desperately. "We've got to stop it. Take your cape off—Magic!"

HODAR had never had as tough an assignment as this in any theater.

I've seen him make elephants disappear from a stage and have them reappear in a flash of brilliant color an instant later in an upper balcony aisle; I've seen him break out of escape-proof jail cells—but this was another thing.

He pushed his way through the crowd, yanking off his black full-length cape as he went. Upon reaching the Indian's side he drew a small packet from his pocket.

Instantly there was a blinding, white powder flash. As the billowing cloud of smoke blew away there was the figure of Hodar making an elaborate pass with his cape.

"*Cripes!*" someone shouted in amazement. "*The Indian! He's gone!*"

The men backed away momentarily, gaping at the noose swinging emptily from the barn joist. Then Hodar made another pass with his cape. A big white frantic rabbit struggled desperately to get out of the noose.

Two steps brought Hodar before the mob ringleader. "Convincing, isn't it?" Hodar snapped. "Try any more lynching around here and I'll make you all disappear . . . or I'll turn you into rabbits."

Edwards, the lynchleader, retreated. There came a low murmur from the crowd. Hodar stared at the circle of half angry, semi-perplexed faces, matching will against will. Again he moved as if to make another pass with his cape and the crowd fell back. "Lordy — don't!" someone shouted. The crowd backed away in disorder.

Tabor then rushed to Hodar's side. "Where the injun?" he cried unbelievably.

"Safe," said Hodar.

"W-w-what did you do to make him disappear?" Tabor asked suspiciously.

Hodar grinned.

"Just made him disappear, that's all.

Been doing it for years. By now he's up in Oscar's room in the ranch house. Let's go."

We started for the ranch house when suddenly I remembered that the Governor was due to arrive in Caxton shortly.

"The Sheriff can't meet him anymore," I said. "Maybe you'd better go," I told Hodar.

"I'll send Greco along too," Tabor cut in.

A FEW minutes later Tom Tabor and I repaired to my quarters in the ranch house where we found the young Indian, Bill Running Wind still pretty bewildered as a result of Hodar's high class snatch.

"How I get here?" he asked Tabor.

"Never mind," I cut in. "You're here. Isn't that enough?" I knew, of course, how Hodar had done it. Hodar's good at snap-hypnotism. And under cover of that blanket of smoke, the Indian had employed all the native craft at slipping away without being seen that had been passed on to him by his ancestors from ages back. It had all been called to the fore by Hodar's hypnotic spell. Most of the disappearance, naturally, had been simply some quick movements through the smoke.

The Indian stared at me queerly. He seemed distinctly shocked that I could speak and it was clear that he took me for some strange form of animal, perhaps Tabor's mascot. I was soon to find this trait of misinterpretation common among American Indians. Perhaps it has to do with my nose—but I'll come to that later.

Now, I doffed my ten gallon sombrero and while pacing the floor, shot questions at the brave. Realizing that detecting must always begin with generalities, I began by gathering information about the weather, Arizona

mountains, Indian life in general. Then we came to the point.

"Where were you when this massacre occurred?" I asked.

The Indian's bronzed features took on a worried expression.

"In mountains," he said. "For a week I am hunting in mountains near Flagstaff. Early today I come back to my reservation. I find my people on warpath like old days. Nobody recognizes me. Indians from other tribes also on warpath. Nobody sleep."

"How'd you know Sheriff Stockton was going to be killed?" I asked.

"Am not sure," said the Indian. "I no like my people on warpath. Go away to Arroyo seco for sleep alone. White men ride by in arroyo so I listen. I hear them talk about sheriff. They say they got to kill him because he know too much about Indian trouble." The brave paused to take a drink of water.

"What troubles?" I interrupted.

The young Indian stared at me blankly.

"Somebody has been feeding the Injuns whiskey again," Tabor cut in darkly.

"My people not drunk," Bill Running Wind replied bitterly. "They are on warpath like old times."

"Why?"

"I no understand," replied the Indian.

"Who were the men you heard in the arroyo?" I asked suddenly.

The Indian jerked himself erect and stared from Tabor to myself, then out the window in a troubled manner. "I no see them very well," he began. "But I see brands on their ponies. One brand is from—from—fr—"

"Great Gods—look out!" Tabor shouted.

I lunged to one side and caught my breath at what I saw. The young brave leaped past me, brandishing a bowie

knife above his head. His face was twisted in a savage leer as he slashed at my throat.

"He's gone mad, raving mad!" Tabor shouted, yanking desperately at his gun.

"YYEEEOOOEE!" The young Indian let out a blood curdling war whoop as he spun and leaped toward Tabor with murder in his glaring eyes.

The bowie knife went up. Instantly there was the deafening roar of a six gun. The bowie leaped toward the ceiling, the Indian let a wild, enraged cry fall from his foam flecked lips. A stream of blood coursed down his shattered wrist as he leaped upon Tabor before the latter could trigger his gun again.

THE battle ended as quickly as it had begun. With a bullet shattered wrist, the Indian was no match for Tom Tabor. In less than a minute Tom had the bronzed warrior roped as neatly as a branded calf.

"Plumb loco," Tabor grunted as he finished the knots on the rope and retrieved his own gun. Meanwhile the Indian struggled with his bonds and glared at the two of us without the slightest sign of recognition. "Gone wild just like the rest of them. Don't even recognize us. Might have scalped us if I hadn't winged 'im," said Tabor.

I said nothing. Instead I began snooping around, my tulip nose fluttering like the wings of a humming bird in nervous excitement. And boy was I excited! There was an odor in the room—a strange fascinating odor attached to the Indian.

That odor said something, but it sounded as garbled and unintelligible as esperanto. As you know, smells are my forte. We Martians use odors in place of sounds for speech. Having sensitive tulip noses and perfect control

of all glands in our bodies, duct and ductless, we find it simple to converse without making sound.

It is like an athlete's control over muscles. We just control or read odor frequencies (we use sound as a source of power instead of outmoded electrical energy). Sometimes I forget myself, particularly with Hodar, and speak with odors until I notice my friend holding his nose. Then I remember that it's not polite to speak to foreigners in a language they can't understand . . . Particularly when it smells.

But now I was really upset. Here was an odor, to me a message, that was as garbled as a cross word puzzle. I snooped around desperately, smelling the Indian, various corners of the room and various objects while Tom Tabor stared at me as if I had gone daffy.

"What's wrong with you?" Tabor asked.

"I'm listening," I said.

"I don't hear nothing," said Tabor bewildered.

"The smell—" I said. "Don't you get it? Sometimes it sounds like Strawinsky, now it's like Basin Street Blues . . ."

That was as far as I got with my analysis of the contents of the odor. Suddenly there was a vigorous knock at the door.

"Come in," Tabor called.

A dudishly dressed, paunchy man swept into the room, followed by a thin hawk-nosed individual in a checkered suit. The paunchy man flashed a look of recognition at Tabor before his eyes sorted me out. I recognized him immediately from pictures I had seen—Boss Humbolt, head of the state political steamroller.

Humbolt sized me up contemptuously.

"You're Oscar Meyers?" he grunted.

"Oscar of Mars," I said proudly.

Humbolt glared at me curiously, meanwhile talking out of the side of his mouth to his aide.

"Funny little runt. Okay, arrest him, Joe."

Joe stepped around Humbolt, drawing an automatic from an armpit holster as he advanced.

"Wait a while," I said. "What's this about?"

"You're under arrest," Humbolt replied laconically.

"You can't arrest me," I replied. "I claim diplomatic immunity under United States laws and regulations in regards to treatment of official emissaries from foreign countries. I'm an emissary from Mars."

Humbolt frowned for a second; finally he puffed up like an adder. "Mars . . . United States laws, huh! Arrest him, Joe. I'm the law in this state."

Tabor quickly stepped between Humbolt's aide and me

"What's the matter, Humbolt? Why's Oscar wanted?" he asked calmly.

"This Oscar Meyers' pal, a gent named Hodar, just dusted off the Governor as his train pulled into Caxton," Humbolt answered.

"The Governor—dead!" Tabor said stunned.

"Dat's right," smirked Joe.

"Hodar never killed the Governor," I cried upon recovering from my first shock. "Not Hodar!"

Humbolt shrugged indifferently.

"Sez you! Your pal is in jail already. Nabbed in the act. Shot the Governor with that pint-size thirty-two of his."

"How sure are you?" I demanded heatedly.

"Look," said Humbolt. He flipped a twisted, steel-jacketed .32 caliber slug before my eyes. "We dug it out

of the Governor's chest. There's only one gun that size in this state . . . The one your pal uses. And we got witnesses." Humbolt turned to Tom Tabor. "We ordered one of your hands to stay in town until the trial—if there ain't a lynching before then. He saw the shooting. Greco."

"Lynch Hodar—" I repeated aghast.

"You're under arrest as an accomplice to the murder of the Governor," Humbolt cut in.

I was too stunned for a moment to even think of escape. I visioned Hodar dragged from the Caxton jail by a wild lynch mob. No . . . They couldn't do that! Hodar held for murder, assassination . . .

I saw his pretty dark haired wife, Dedrie, who had remained behind in Washington waiting for a shipment of one of those mysterious Earthian things called "a blessed event." No! Dear Dedrie must be spared the shock that I now felt. Had I brought them together for this? Great Martian Gods, no!

CHAPTER III

The Talking Holster

"LISTEN, Humbolt! Oscar's a guest at the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch and he's a friend of mine," Tabor spoke squarely to the state political boss. "Yuh know Tom Tabor's word is good all over this state. As a favor I'm asking you not to take Oscar. I'm vouching for him."

My eyes sort of swam as I heard Tabor's words. I let a pleasant and friendly odor drift toward the big man in sheer thankfulness.

"You and Joe get back to Caxton," Tabor continued. "You know who runs this county, Humbolt. I'm expecting to see that Hodar isn't touched by any

mob. He's going to get a fair trial or you're going to answer for it."

Boss Humbolt hesitated a moment, frowning at Tabor and me. He was probably counting the number of votes in the county and weighing them against Hodar's skin. Finally he nodded,

"Okay, Tabor," he said. "You bring him in when we ship the Judge down here."

The instant Boss Humbolt and his gun-toting aide departed I spun into action. With Hodar in jail for murder and myself temporarily free on word bond I figured it was high time to get working on the case.

I realized that it was already the most complicated job I had ever had in my short career as the only Martian detective on Earth. A sheriff murdered with a poisoned arrow. A complete tribe of Indians mysteriously going on the warpath, massacring whites, then vanishing from the reservation. An Indian going berserk just as he was about to reveal important information. Then Hodar framed on a murder charge—or was he?

"What did the Colorado Kid have to do with all this business?" I asked myself. "Better forget him for a minute and get down to detail now," I mused.

My plan of action devised itself speedily. I'd work from the rear of the case to the beginning. First I had to clear Hodar.

"A .32 caliber bullet in the Governor and a witness—Greco! There are ways to make Greco talk without him realizing it. That's my job."

I buckled a gun belt around my waist, eased the two-horn-handled, low-slung guns into the holsters. Because of my penguin shape and size, the guns sort of dragged on the ground, slapping my sides like sabers as I waddled across

the ranch yard to the corral.

Though not a very distinguished sight, I was already a proficient horseman. I rode a knob-kneed pinto; sitting erect in the saddle, my body swaying gently in almost uncanny unity with the measured pace of my mount. Of course, since my legs were so stubby, I had to use napkin rings instead of stirrups.

As I galloped from the corral in a swirl of dust, I saw The Colorado Kid take leave of Alice Stockton, whom he had been talking with. He raced across the yard, swung upon his jet black horse and spurred after me. "I'll be moseying along with ya, little stranger," he drawled, pulling his horse to a trot beside my pinto. "I guess you're a-going into Caxton ta see about your pal in jail, eh?"

"How'd you know?" I asked.

"Got my ear ta the ground," the lean westerner smiled casually.

There was something I liked about the lanky rider. It lay behind his cold gray eyes and the half smile on his lips. Using the vernacular of the west, I tried to satisfy the curiosity that fairly itched within me.

"Listen, Kid," I said. "I haven't shuffled the deck yet. I figure you hold a couple of cards I'm needing so let's cut and start the deal. You know who I am. Let's start by you telling me who you are and why you wanted to see Sheriff Stockton before he got killed?"

The Colorado Kid stared momentarily toward the sage colored hills to the left of the road, then his eyes settled upon me frankly.

"Guess I know a lot more about you than you know about me," he said. "Oscar, detective of Mars—I sure think a lot of you. Heard about how you busted up them Zombie murderers in Washington. That was pretty smart

thinking."*

"Smart smelling, you mean," I murmured, preening myself somewhat.

"Whall, maybe you can give me a hand," The Colorado Kid added. "I'm a special agent for the Indian Commission in Colorado. We've been having a little trouble with Indians on our reservations. Kinda mysterious too. Some of them clean forgot they was living in the 20th Century and getting sixty bucks a month from the Government. Went loco wild, off on the war-path like they was fighting the Indian wars all over."

"Uprisings?" I said, suddenly interested.

"Just the start of it," answered the Kid. "But we can't figure out why or how. I was put on the job and the trail sort of led down to this country."

"Trail?" I asked.

The Kid fumbled in his shirt pocket, his fingers jerking forth a tobacco sack. He undid the sack and handed me a crumpled piece of paper.

"A letter," he said. "We found it near the Southwest Reservation. Seemed to have some connection with the Indian trouble as far as I make out."

BEFORE unfolding it, I smelled the letter but found that it no longer held traces of identifying odors, save a smell which the Kid said was "Bull Durham." Then I read it.

**START WIDESPREAD ACTION
JUNE 12TH. GOODS DELIVERED.
ARIZONA, NEVADA, CALIFORNIA,
COLORADO, NEW MEXICO,
UTAH AND TEXAS READY. THE
TIME IS RIPE.**

(Signed) LA CABEZA

* The Colorado Kid refers to Oscar's adventures in *Death Walks in Washington*, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March, 1941.—Ed.

"La Cabeza," said the Kid, "means *head*—the chief. The envelope this was found in came from the Hopi Reservation near Sugar Creek."

It was then that I jerked my pinto to a halt and stared at the Kid. "Great Gods," I cried. "Today is June 12th and the Indian uprisings are scheduled to blast loose on the reservations in seven states. There's going to be hell to pay in the West. Come on!"

The discovery of the letter Colorado Kid carried in no way changed my plans. We broke our horses from a gallop to an idle canter upon reaching the outskirts of Caxton. I led the way along the dusty main street, past the post office and the tumbledown jail where Hodar was prisoner, finally tying up before the Hondo Saloon.

I shoved open the tall swinging doors and stepped inside, followed by the Kid.

A half dozen men stood with their backs to the bar. Some of them opened their mouths in wonderment as I crossed the barroom floor, my guns trailing a line in the dust upon the creaky boards, and came to the end of the bar—face to face with Greco.

The Mexican wrangler stared down in astonishment; then a worried, deceitful expression framed his swarthy features. The cigarette in his mouth curled its smoke anxiously while his fingers cautiously slipped toward his gun butts.

"Keep your hands in your belt." The Colorado Kid's even voice addressed Greco.

Greco's thumbs came up, paused on his cartridge belt. He stared shiftily from the Kid to me. The men at the bar moved to one side.

"Greco! Who are you working for—Tabor or La Cabeza?" I snapped the question out.

The Mexican's brown fingers jerked

involuntarily. He shot me a bewildered glance.

"La Cabeza?" he said. "I never hear that name, Señor."

I glared at the wrangler with cold, challenging eyes. "You never heard of it, eh?" I repeated.

"No, leetle one," Greco shrugged.

"Listen, Greco," I said. "I'm giving you one minute to say that Hodar didn't shoot the Governor. Now talk! One . . . two . . ."

"But I see him shoot," Greco answered smoothly.

"Talk—I said! Hear me!"

Despite the wrangler's smooth appearance, his eyes showed a quick flare of savage fury. That was exactly what I wanted. Deliberately, I goaded the man's rage.

"Talk, quick, you coyote," I spat.

Greco suddenly moved. Like a darting snake's head, his fingers stabbed downward. Fast—the man to beat that draw needed a gun with sights filed off and leather tied-down-hard.

Beside me, the Colorado Kid's hand was a slim blur with a chunk of flashing metal attached. Pounding gun-thunder shook the walls of the rickety saloon as the Kid's six-gun pumped snub-nosed lead across the smoke filled gap. Greco's gun suddenly twirled sideways, clattering upon the floor while the Mexican grabbed his wrist in agony.

During the roar of guns I suddenly ducked to the floor. My delicate nose needed protection, and there was something else I was looking for—I'll tell you about that in a minute.

As the acrid smelling powder smoke subsided, I saw the Colorado Kid ranging the barroom with his twin guns. A couple of men considered a draw but changed their minds. To the right a man was kneeling under a table shivering on all fours.

"Git along, Oscar," The Kid coolly

called to me. "We're leaving these hombres to lick their sores."

We backed through the swinging doors, still keeping the saloon covered. The door swung shut behind us as we reached sunlight and mounted our horses. Cantering down the street, the Kid turned to me, grinning.

"Partner, you ain't gonna last long if you work around like this. One of them talking guns is gonna clip your pretty nose off sure as nothing."

"I got what I wanted," I said.

"I didn't hear Greco do any talking," said the Kid.

Tossing a little wad of powder-burned paper that had fallen from Greco's holster during the draw into my hand, I came as close to a smile as I ever can.

"Greco didn't talk," I said. "But his holster talked plenty."

"Pretty careless of the Mex. That wadding could have plugged his gun," the Kid observed.

"Yeah," I grinned, "Careless enough to clear Hodar of murder if my guess is right."

The Kid reined his jet black mare in the direction of the town jail. As much as I wanted to release Hodar, I knew it wasn't time yet.

"Wait," I said. "Hodar's safer in jail for the moment—listen!"

IN front of Caxton's dust coated General Store a tinny radio blared forth a startling news broadcast. The Kid and I halted within hearing.

"Station KXY, Phoenix," the announcer's metallic voice drummed forth ominously. "Newsflash . . . A mysterious outbreak of Indian troubles sweeps the West at this very moment. Indians on at least a dozen Reservations in seven states have made attempts to massacre various small White settlements bordering the Reservations.

According to latest reports war parties from the Zuni, Apache, Sioux and Hopi tribes are moving toward the Sugar Creek Basin in Arizona . . .

"Flash . . . A United States Cavalry unit has just been dispatched to the Sugar Creek area to intercept the rampaging redskins and quiet the disorder . . .

"Flash . . . Shocking confirmation of the report that Governor Henry Weeks of Arizona was assassinated today has just been received by this station. The Governor was shot as he descended from his private train at Caxton in the Sugar Creek area . . .

"Flash . . . Stand by for an important announcement. Local papers please print. This station has been requested to make an appeal for the celebrated detective, Oscar Mars, to report to the nearest FBI agency immediately . . . Station KXY, Phoenix . . .

"Flash . . . If you have troubles, if you live in the West, the Dimson Loan Company will be . . ." Someone snapped off the radio.

Glancing nonchalantly at the Colorado Kid, I tipped my sombrero rakishly and preened myself with a certain modesty. "I don't know what the United States Government and the FBI would have done if I hadn't come from Mars," I observed.

A crowd of townspeople, lanky buckeroos, cowmen and tradespeople had gathered around the General Store. Their first reactions to the broadcast had been those of doubt, then as the details piled one upon another, a growing element of mob anger shaped itself. Men instinctively fingered their gun butts or glowered toward the western ridge of hills—the Hopi Reservation.

"More trouble," drawled the Kid.

A big touring car, its motor purring powerfully, pulled up across the street and the crowd quickly encircled it.

"Lot of trouble," I said. "That's Boss Humbolt in that car."

Humbolt faced the crowd with the airs and pomp of a petty dictator.

"What are you waiting for, men?" he shouted. "Our forefathers stopped the redskins, are you afraid? Are you going to wait until they come whooping into Caxton, scalping, murdering, burning? They're sending the United States Cavalry," he spoke ironically, "Well them horsemen won't get near Sugar Creek until tomorrow! What's going to happen to you between now and tomorrow?"

An ugly howl went up from the crowd. Men shook their fists.

"That's right," they shouted. "We've gotta fight!"

"Fight, and fight hard," Humbolt charged in a fiery voice. "The Indians must be put in their place, once and for all."

"Wipe every last one of 'em out;" someone shouted.

The crowd suddenly broke up as men leaped upon their horses while others scattered to get their guns.

"It's suicide!" the Colorado Kid said grimly. "They can't fight them Indians. It's plain ordinary suicide. What's Humbolt thinking of?"

"I've got a fair hunch. Come on. The answer is on the Hopi-Reservation. We'd better get along before too many people get killed."

"But the Indians aren't there," the Kid countered.

"That's right," I snapped. "*But the Reservation didn't vanish.*"

CHAPTER IV

Prisoners Two

A BRAZEN sun slanted fiercely across the parched red rocks and drew sharp shadows from the spiny

cactus and dull mesquite that surrounded Redstone, the Government administrative village in the center of the Hopi reservation.

There seemed to be a strange suspension of sound and life that stretched from the dark rim of the Black Mesa on the northwest to the Reservation itself as the Colorado Kid and I rode into the deserted village.

"Jist like I said before," the Kid muttered slowly. "Not an Indian in sight; not a white man left in the town."

Suddenly something strange happened. My pinto shied and flattened his ears. Then my nose caught the horrible, heart chilling odors—the smell of death mingled with the faint glandular odor of fear and surprise.

Leaping from my mount, I raced into the low redbrick administrative building. But, abruptly, I came to a staggering halt. My eyes fairly popped from their sockets as they swept the bizarre inhuman scene.

Lying in a twisted heap at the head of the stairway were a half-dozen white men, their skulls split, revealing ghastly and bloody fractures, the results of tommyhawks. A six-shooter on the floor was covered with dried blood—the empty chambers mute evidence of the battle that was lost.

I glanced up at the Colorado Kid who nodded grimly toward a further room. "This ain't all," he said.

Following his gaze, I suddenly blinked, feeling even the thicker blood in my Martian veins chill.

"Great Gods!" I gasped with an icy intake of breath.

The shapely body of a slim girl was stretched across a table. Her clothing was half torn. Her throat was a mass of bluish ugly bruises. Her head hung back over the table edge in a fantastic unnatural position. And her head—it was—I turned my gaze aside, unable

to look another instant.

"Scalped—" The Kid spoke laconically.

"What did they do here?" I asked, nodding toward the massacred people.

"Worked for the Indian Commission," replied the Kid. "Some of them were doctors, nurses, office workers, food administrators. They lived here."

My nose began to quiver almost involuntarily.

"The smell!" I cried. "The one that sounded like Strawinsky and Basin Street."

The Kid looked at me queerly as I buzzed around, snooping in and out, from one room to another, barely noticing the horror that confronted us in each new doorway. All at once the tulip ends of my nostrils vibrated so intensely that they began to shake my teeth. It was the Reservation food commissary and pharmacy.

I SNATCHED a group of jars from a shelf, examining them and their contents. The smell had me puzzled again. It was the same strange, semi-bitter odor I had detected at the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch the moment Indian brave, Bill Running Wind had gone berserk.

Finally I stared at the jars in amazement. The labels read: SAFFRON and BAYLEAF.

"It's queer," I remarked. "There are two extra chemical odors in here beside saffron and bayleaf. There is a touch of *Tincture Argalli spicati Colorado*, a marijuana quite different and five times as powerful as the common locoweed found in Texas and Mexico. I also get a smell of *Epinephrine*, a compound drug that raises blood pressure."

I looked at the Kid sharply.

"What do they do with this stuff?"

I demanded puzzled.

The Kid shrugged. "The Indians use the saffron and bayleaf to color and flavor rice. But I never heard of them other things, except the locoweed. Never heard of them mixing that stuff up. Maybe you got something, Oscar."

I knew I had something. Whenever a case gets to the point where I can reduce it to chemical compounds it's easy sailing. Chemistry and bio-chemistry are my specialty due to my laboratory-like tulip nose and my capacity for deducting formulas — qualities every Martian is born with.

In my pocket I had the powder burned wad of paper that would clear Hodar of murder. In my mind I held the elements for the solution to the Indian puzzle. As far as getting Hodar out of jail, any kind of jail, I had a Martian trick up my sleeve—but I'll show you that later.

"Right now we've got to put two and two together and we'll find the key to the Indian puzzle," I said. "Number one, Kid, we drift over to the Zuni Reservation on the Black Mesa. See if the Indians have vacated that and check up on whether there's more of this big medicine on their commissary shelves. I'll meet you tomorrow at the Sugar Creek Fork. Dawn. Okay with you?"

After the Kid had gone, leaving me surrounded by the grim little village of Redstone, I went into action. The case had progressed to the point where things stood pretty clear in my mind. I needed work-space.

I set up a little laboratory of my own and began meddling with various Indian herbs. I went to one jar, then another, smelling, tabulating. I'm always pretty sensitive to odor harmonies but some, here, were amazingly savage. Maybe, because I'm a Martian, I'm different. The smell of Sage makes me moody. But I changed the label on a

bottle of tetrachloride to "Indian love call." That's how it sounded to me.

By sundown I made my final experiment and the results were incredible. Mixing a bowl of saffron and bayleaf flavored rice (plus the *Tinc. Argalli spicati Colorado* and the *Epinephrine*), I fed it to an emaciated Indian dog I found in the village.

At first the beast looked a little drugged—the locoweed. Suddenly, instead of his bloodpressure rising, a strange change took place. For an instant the dog stiffened as if he had been shocked. Finally his hair stood up on end—the *Epinephrine*.

I backed away abruptly for the beast had become a howling plain-born wolf, baring his fangs at me, snarling hideously, totally oblivious of the fact it was my hand which had fed him a moment before.

"Come on, pooch, take it easy," I cooed placatively.

The dog snarled and leaped at me, snapping and slashing at my throat and delicate nose. He missed me by the barest fraction of an inch. I backed toward the door, meanwhile struggling to get my gun out. . .

An unexpected twanging sound vibrated behind me and for an astonishing instant I saw the wolf-like dog crumble a yard ahead of me with a feathered arrow protruding from his throat. Then I whirled, gaping in bewilderment.

So silently had the five Hopi Indians approached that I had no chance to escape. Bronzed hands gripped me from all sides so that before I knew it my own arms were fastened behind my back with rawhide thongs.

The Indians danced about, staring at me in wonderment, poking me with curious fingers. Wide white bands bound the straight black locks of the Hopis. Eagle and bearclaw necklaces

were at their throats while their naked torsos gleamed with bear fat and their sweating faces glistened beneath coats of fantastically applied warpaint.

Although I noticed the curious way in which they watched me as well as poked me between the ribs with their long scalping knives, it was not until they had put a halter around my neck and had taken me off into the wilds where the main part of the tribe was encamped that I discovered what had saved me from a scalping.

At the main Indian camp they tethered me in the corral among the ponies. Finally it dawned on me — They thought I was some strange sort of animal, edible perhaps!

And now I got my worst shock. It was like a sudden clip on the nose.

In the center of the camp Indians were performing a blood pulsating, savage dance around a white person tied to a stake. It had become dark and I was unable to see clearly at that distance but in the flickering light from the campfires the figure struck me as strangely familiar.

The wild warwhoops of the braves sent chills through my body. They were more savage than Indian. It was as if the entire tribe had gone berserk, forgetting that they were surrounded by the United States, civilized country. The Indians danced, gyrated and leaped about, timing themselves to weird drum beats, slowly unnerving their victim—a preparation for more elaborate tortures to come.

I watched the wracking ritual until hours later when the last eagle-feathered brave, either drunk with his own violent savagery or dead from fatigue, flung himself to the ground to sleep off the effects of the orgy. The fires flickered low when I finally slipped from the corral and crept cautiously toward the circle.

I picked my way skillfully through the brush in a manner unequalled by any redskin. Suddenly one of the Indians stirred. Crouching in the shadows, I held my breath and waited. A moment later I slipped forward again with the same pantherish caution. Twenty feet, ten, five . . . Then I clamped my teeth on a surprised gasp—

"Alice!" It was Alice Stockton.

The girl looked haggard from the ordeal she had endured, yet she took it as only a redhaired western girl can. She struggled to undo the cords holding her wrists when she saw me. An eastern girl would have sobbed a couple of times.

CHAPTER V

The Secret of the Red Men

"OSCAR—thank God you've come!" the girl whispered in relief.

I attempted a reassuring smile as I stepped over the body of a prone redskin and came to her side.

"I didn't come," I said. "They brought me."

"Where's the Colorado Kid?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice. By its queer little tremor I was sure that she and the Kid were ready to play housekeeping if the two ever got together again.

Alice indicated the thongs binding her wrists and legs.

"Get these undone, quick."

While I worked with desperate haste upon the fiendishly clever Indian knots, she told me what had happened.

"There's something wrong—something terrible. It's bigger and more horrible than we think," she said in a strained whisper. Then she shuddered momentarily and in the dim light I saw her youthful breast tremble in silhouette. For a second I forgot our peril.

Even to a Martian, a girl like Alice is a thrill.

"The Indians," Alice continued. "Something's happened to them. They seem to have gone primitive. It's almost as if they've been pushed back a few generations. My grandfather was an old Indian fighter and these Hopis are acting the same as the Indians in his day."

I pricked up my ears. Although she had no knowledge of it, Alice had just answered the one big puzzle confronting me—the secret of the Indians. *Here was the solution to my unfinished experiment with the wild dog.*

"Pushed back—" I gasped.

"Yes," said Alice. "They seem to have forgotten everything that's happened to their nation, in fact in America, for the last two or three generations. They don't even talk English now. Only Indian, which I understand a bit. I thought it was queer when they first captured me. Then I saw them cooking in their old, primitive ways. They're on the warpath, Oscar! I heard them making plans in their war council for a big battle against General Custer's white soldiers at Echo Canyon."

"Custer?" I asked. The name was vaguely familiar.

"He's dead," said Alice. "He was an Indian fighter. His company was massacred in Montana by the Siouxs—but more than sixty years ago."

"Sixty—!" Suddenly I stopped fiddling with the knots and stared at the girl in amazement. "Great Gods!" I gasped. "Why didn't I think of it? Incredible!"

"Oscar—the knots?" Alice pleaded.

My fingers were paralyzed by the fantastic possibilities of the idea that had popped into my brain. It was the solution! Something had set the Indians back almost three generations. *A mysterious form of racial amnesia!*

Racial amnesia, not individual amnesia! The thought almost floored me.

"And worse," I muttered, "It's like that dog that turned into wolf. The amnesia has made them forget everything for three generations. They've forgotten the Reservations, the United States Government, the Indian schools—they're fighting the Indian Wars all over again."

"Oscar! What are you talking about?" Alice cried in bewilderment.

"The drugs—" I said abruptly. "That mixture, it made them lose their time sense. The locoweed or marijuana jumbled up their memories. The epinephrine, in big enough doses, gave them such a shock it caused amnesia."

"Oscar!" The note of horror in Alice's voice suddenly jarred me to my senses. My eyes swept in the direction that she watched so intently, then I felt my heart clog my throat . . . Two barbarically painted Indian braves had arisen and were marching toward the corral.

A MOMENT later their cries of surprise seemed to arouse the entire camp. They had discovered that I was no longer in the corral.

"They're searching for you," Alice whispered tensely. "They'll be here in a second."

I saw one of the Indians lying nearby turn over. Desperately I worked again, tugging at the thongs holding Alice. The knots were so well tied even Hodar couldn't have slipped out of them. Instantly, I realized there was only one thing to do. Disappear! If the Indians captured me again they'd guard me closely, then I'd have no chance to rescue Alice.

Much as I hated leaving her in a moment like this, we both realized it was the only course. Alice smiled at me bravely as I scooted toward the camp

border. A second later I raced down a brush covered incline while half the Hopi tribe stormed after me.

It was then I realized I was no match for an American Indian. My greater weight and sluggishness of limb, due to the difference of gravity between my own planet and Earth, could scarcely overcome the greater swiftness of the redskins. There was a wild shout behind me when one brave spotted my trail. Putting on a burst of speed, I came to a stagnant watering hole just beyond the camp.

Thinking quickly, I dove into the water and submerged myself amidst some water lily pads. And not a moment too soon. A half dozen Indians came to a halt around the pool just as the last ripples upon the surface smoothed out. They circled the embankment, certain that if any man had submerged himself in the water, he must soon come up for air. But I didn't.

They waited for five minutes, ten minutes, an hour. Not once in that time did I break the surface. And I thanked my planets that I was a Martian. My disguise had the redskins buffaloed. It might even surprise anyone. I was camouflaged as a water-lily. The only part of my body that showed above the water was my tulipnose, well surrounded by water-lily pads.

WATER is very conducive to thought. Archimedes discovered the principle of specific gravity when he yelled "Eureka" in a bathtub. I, Oscar of Mars, also had time for a good deal of thinking while in the Indian watering hole.

I had time enough to review the entire case on which I was working. As a result, I knew I was pretty near its solution. To my own satisfaction, I had cleared Hodar of a murder charge and incidentally I had the proof of who

had murdered the Governor. That I'll tell you later. Actually the Governor had been killed in such an ingenious manner that the solution had come as easily as strawberries and cream.

Sheriff Stockton's death was more mysterious, but I already had a hunch who was connected with his murder. As for the strange racial amnesia which had suddenly sent the Indian tribes on the war path—well, I knew the chemical causes. Now all I needed was the human factor behind it. That still had me puzzled though I felt I was on the verge of discovery.

Being so engrossed in the thoughts, I scarcely noticed the quick passage of time. It was not until the warm rays of the morning sun penetrated the water and lily pads that I came to the sudden realization that Alice was still in danger.

Extremely cautious, I poked my head above the water while two water lilies clung to my conical ears. I waited a few minutes, scanning the embankment carefully, my eyes alert for the slightest movement in the brush. Nowhere was there a sign of life. The Indians had apparently given up their search . . . Or maybe it was a trap, I thought.

Silently, I worked my way up the bank and crept soundlessly toward the Indian camp. Finally I stopped to listen. The strange, unearthly quiet of the place sent a chill through my veins. I didn't like that stillness. It wasn't what I had expected. Something had gone wrong.

At last, through an opening in the brush, I viewed the Indian encampment. *Deserted!* My heart sank to my toes as I ran forward to the place where I had last seen Alice Stockton. She was nowhere about!

"Alice!" I shouted. "Alice!"

I stumbled about, barely noticing the

cold ashes of abandoned campfires. I swore bitterly at myself. I had blundered again. In the time that I was saving my own tough skin by hiding in the water hole they might have murdered the girl. I began snooping about, my tulip nose itching to snatch a sign of what the berserk savages had done with Alice.

Quickly picking up the trail, I plunged toward a narrow gap in the hills. My heart beat frantic orders to my hurrying feet for it knew that Alice might only be saved by the barest margin of time.

Then abruptly, I stopped and stared toward the head of the arroyo. I stared in half astonishment for down the cutting came a wild pack of barking, baying animals—bloodhounds, I believe they're called. A second later, Tom Tabor and a posse of men plunged into sight, whipping their horses around the bend at a thunderous clip.

THE howling bloodhounds raced through the sage and skidded to a stop in a half circle around me. Then a very strange thing happened. One after another, the dogs took turns leaping on me in friendly excitement, their ears flopping joyfully, their tongues taking long swiping licks at my face in sheer ecstasy. Some of them leaned against me, rubbing me with their shoulders almost coyly. Others mooned about, making a tremendous fuss over me as if I were their favorite movie star.

Tom Tabor hardly looked surprised upon seeing me surrounded by the dogs.

"Alice Stockton has disappeared," he said as he pulled up his horse. "We sent the dogs to trail her."

I stared at the dogs. Somehow they seemed to have lost all interest in the trail. They now sat around me, their long ears dangling haphazardly, their

eyes filled with hero-worship.

"What's wrong with them hounds?" Tabor muttered. "I ain't never seen them act like that. You'd think they was in love."

I puffed out my chest in honest pride. I knew what was wrong. The bloodhounds were just overcome by hero-worship. They were paying homage to my super-sensitive tulip nose. Wasn't I, Oscar of Mars, the Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot of bloodhounds? When they licked my face it was the same as a movie fan getting an autograph from their favorite star.

"What are you doing out here?" Tabor asked. "Thought you went to town."

"I'm trailing Alice. The Indians captured her," I said.

"Alice?" Tabor jerked.

I nodded. Suddenly I remembered Greco.

"Listen, Tabor," I said. "You've got someone on your ranch pulling wool over your eyes. One of your hands, Greco, knows a little more about the Governor's murder than you think."

"Greco? You mean the Mex wrangler?" Tabor glanced at me in surprise.

"Better arrest him," I said.

"Nobody's gonna arrest Greco," came the slow drawl from behind me. It was the Colorado Kid. He had slipped off his horse and crawled up among the rocks along the Arroyo to investigate what was going on. "Greco's dead!" he added flatly.

"Dead!" Tom Tabor stared at the Kid darkly.

"Dead—" I repeated. "He can't be. He murdered the Governor. *I've got the proof!*"

The Kid smiled at me. "Sorry, partner. Greco's dead anyway. I dusted him off. I was over by the Zuni Reservation where you sent me. Some-

thing happened there as at the Hopi Reservation here. All the government people massacred and the same smelling chemicals in those jars."

"What about Greco?" asked one of Tabor's men.

"He was there too—robbing the bodies. So I dusted him off. I never could stand buzzards, birds or human."

For a moment I felt slightly dizzy. I wanted Greco alive. I needed him to prove that Hodar wasn't a murderer. Now it would take me weeks to get Hodar out of that jail. We'd have to go through an entire legal rigmarole.

"Listen," said the Kid, "Greco's small fry. This Indian trouble is coming to a head. I got information that thousands of redskins, war parties from four tribes, are moving in on Echo Canyon. The U. S. Cavalry unit from Fort Gore is due through there on its way to Sugar Creek! They're gonna be ambushed! We've got to warn them. Come on!"

"No!" I said. "I'll take care of that."

They looked at me queerly.

"I'll handle the Indians," I repeated. "You've got a job, Kid. Alice has been kidnapped. You and Tabor have got to trail her and bring her back safely. Okay?"

CHAPTER VI

The Mystery of La Cabeza

MID-MORNING I rode into Caxton on a borrowed pinto. Having avoided the roads, I came in across country and headed directly for the local livery barn where I put up the pinto. I then prepared myself for a desperate plan I had conceived to liberate Hodar.

I needed Hodar if I were to stop the Indian march on Echo Canyon. And I needed something else too . . . The

final proof of what had started the Indian trouble.

I fitted myself out with a Remington rifle and a horsehair lasso. The livery stable man eyed me curiously, but said nothing. He was more interested in the fate of his townsmen who were out in the hills, courting death, trying to locate the Indian war parties. Perhaps he thought I was going out to join them.

After first glancing up and down the deserted sweltering street, I cut behind a couple of houses and approached the town jail. Then I saw Hodar's handsome though worried face in one of the cell windows.

"Oscar," he cried. "Where've you been? What the hell is happening around here?"

"I'm getting you out, Hodar," I answered briefly.

"You can't," Hodar shook his head grimly. "Wait until you see what they've done to me."

"Is there a guard?" I asked quickly.

"Yes. In the front. But that doesn't make any difference. You'll see."

"Start making a racket," I cut in. "Make plenty of noise, right now. I'll handle the rest."

Hodar looked at me gloomily.

"Okay, but it won't help," he answered.

I slipped away from the barred window, wondering what had happened to my friend that he should be in such a hopeless frame of mind. Wasn't my coming a good sign? Just as I came around toward the front of the jail I heard Hodar begin yelling like a maniac, beating the bars of his cell and screaming.

The noise went on for about a minute—just long enough. I pushed my way into the jail house and saw a peg-legged man, the guard, beating the bars of Hodar's cell with a club in order to quiet him.

"Cuss that racket!" the guard growled. "Murdering varmint, can't you let a man sleep?"

"Sleep is right," I grunted, letting the guard have the butt end of my Remington.

The fellow dropped to the floor with a dull thud. He hadn't made an outcry. In less than a minute I had him thoroughly wrapped with the horsehair lariat, then I turned my attention to Hodar.

"Come on, Hodar! We've got work to do," I said. "Where does this fellow keep his keys?"

"Work! Keys!" Hodar answered satirically. He pointed at the locked cell door. "If all that was needed were keys, I would have been out of here already," he snapped. "I'm a magician and an escape expert but between Houdini and I, we've never been able to break out of a cell like this."

I looked at the door, then my mouth shot open, gaping rather foolishly. *The iron lock of the door was welded in place!* The townspeople knew Hodar was a magician. They weren't taking any chances of having him break out.

"You'll have to get an acetylene torch," said Hodar.

"We haven't got time," I snapped. "Let me think."

"Maybe I should starve so I can squeeze through the bars," Hodar cut in scornfully.

"Listen," I said. "Close your eyes, Hodar. Do exactly as I say. I'm going to do something that may even astonish you as a magician. Now do exactly as I say . . . Eyes closed . . . Thinking of nothing but the bars . . . Think hard . . . Breathe evenly, then for an instant, stop thinking of everything . . . Ready?"

HODAR nodded silently. I reached through the bars, touching Ho-

dar's chest with my hand. His heart beat was exactly right. Quickly, I drew a small gadget from my pocket, a tiny iridescent metallic tube with a small dial fixed to its surface. I will not take time at the moment to explain the details of its mechanism save to note that the tube came with me from Mars and this was the first time I found myself forced to use it on Earth.

I twirled the dial, hit the exact calibration. Instantly there was a flash of yellow light in the jailroom. It worked! Hodar now stood beside me, free. His cell was empty and the door was untouched, still welded.

My friend looked at me in bewildered amazement and failed to notice that I slipped the tube back in my pocket.

"Oscar," he gasped "What did you do? How'd you get me out here?"

"Magic," I answered off-handedly. "Martian magic. Unlike your Earthly magic which deals mainly in sleight of hand technique, our Martian magic is based on science or scientific principles."

"But how'd you get me out of there?" Hodar repeated a bit stunned.

I smiled and tried to explain in simple terms.

"Optical transmission," I said. "I'll give you the details some day when your theater audiences get bored with your own brand of magic. But now, we've work cut out for us."

I briefly explained what had transpired since I had last seen Hodar. I told him about the gunfight with Greco. The Indian amnesia developments and the impending ambush of the Government cavalry troops in Echo Canyon.

"Good Lord," Hodar cried. "If those troops are ambushed and massacred there's no telling what will happen in the West."

"That's what I'm afraid of," I said

"Someone administered the drugs causing the Indian amnesia. Someone also engineered the murder of Stockton and the Governor. We've got to find out why?"

"Yeah, but who knows?" Hodar asked hopelessly.

"Stockton," I said.

"But he was murdered."

"Murdered or not, he's got information we want. They brought his body to the jail to await a coroner's examination, didn't they?"

"It's in his office," said Hodar. "Next room over. I'll show you."

A moment later Hodar and I were examining the Sheriff's office. It was a bare cubicle. On a table in one corner, the dead man lay, covered by a strip of canvas. On the floor was his ten gallon sombrero. My eyes leaped toward the battered roll-top desk near the window.

"Look," I cried excitedly. "Someone had the same idea. They've searched the place."

The roll-top desk was a mess. Papers had been pulled from the various pigeon holes, dumped on the floor, drawers left open.

"Don't think they found anything," I added. "They messed things up so much it looks as if they were angry. Furthermore, Sheriff Stockton wasn't the kind to leave important papers in his desk when he was to meet someone whom those papers concerned at the Sugar Creek Dude Ranch rodeo."

Turning from the desk to the table where Stockton's body lay, I yanked the canvas strip aside, staring at the stiffened corpse. The Peace man was still clothed in his blue dusty corduroys. His gunbelt was still around his waist and his high-heeled cow-boots pointed upward stiffly.

I asked myself, "Where would a western sheriff hide important papers?"

Then, almost involuntarily, I responded to a hunch and to Hodar's amazement I tugged vehemently at the dead man's boots. His left boot came off. I sniffed in it and threw it aside. In the right boot I found what I wanted—a sheaf of flatly pressed papers and letters.

HODAR snatched the letters from me and spread them on the dead man's chest.

"Oscar, these are the papers Alice Stockton spoke of!" Hodar cried excitedly.

Then I got the jitters worse than Hodar. These papers were real dynamite. There was a chart of the Western United States with the various Indian Reservations marked out, also a series of curious defense lines extending from the Dakotas to the Mexican border.

"Looks like a big Maginot Line facing the Eastern two-thirds of the United States," Hodar commented.

I hurriedly paged through the remainder of the papers. I knew the answer to that defense line would be among them. There were at least a dozen letters from Boss Humbolt to La Cabeza and answers from the mysterious chieftain. There were also signed letters and instructions from La Cabeza to individuals who apparently worked in the government offices on the various Reservations.

"Good God," Hodar murmured. "We've even got Fifth Columnists on our Indian Reservations."

Suddenly I grabbed a note typed on paper that carried the letterhead, WESTERN MOUNTED RESERVE. It was from La Cabeza to Humbolt. I read:

WESTERN MOUNTED RESERVE
Dear Humbolt:

The time is now ripe! Washington is preoccupied with the foreign situation and will naturally underestimate the extent of trouble once the Indians go on the warpath. Our agents are prepared to administer the necessary drugs in all Reservations shortly before June 12th. Government troops will probably be sent to quell the trouble, but in underestimating its extent, they will be massacred.

The resulting developments will include widespread riots which will immediately discredit Washington in the eyes of the West. As the tension increases we will mobilize the Western Mounted Reserve to take over.

The political machines in each western state are fixed, through our key people, and are prepared to unite in a secession movement similar to the ill fated Southern Confederacy. You, Humbolt, are to set up the capital in Phoenix. I will remain behind the scenes, directing and maintaining control of the Western Mounted Reserve.

(signed) *La Cabeza*

For a moment both Hodar and I were thunderstruck. Here we were staring at the proof of the most fantastic plot anyone had ever conceived against the United States. Neither of us could move for a few stunned minutes.

Finally Hodar gulped and stuttered.

"H-h-humbolt! He's behind this too! A secession movement to split the west from the east. B-b-but why did they frame me?"

"Frame you," I cried. "Why, the whole plot is a frameup. They're creating race riots in order to frame the U. S. Government. The thing is all timed to work so fast that the people in Washington won't know what hit them . . . and with the European situation on their hands, oh boy!"

"How do the secessionists think they can handle the Indians?" Hodar asked worriedly.

I crammed the revealing papers that had caused Stockton's death into my pocket and started for the door.

"The Western Mounted Reserve can do that," I explained hastily. "Remember, Hodar, while we were in Carlsbad we heard something about the Mounteds. They're a secret blackshirt army. They're organized all over the West. They have their own arsenals and rifle ranges. They've been preparing for this. All along people thought they were just crackpots. Now they won't."*

"Too bad Sheriff Stockton didn't report this right away," said Hodar.

"He was cautious," I said. "He wanted to investigate. Then Boss Humbolt or the mysterious La Cabeza discovered he knew too much. They did him in."

I reached for the door, but before my hand touched the knob, the doorway banged open. In the archway stood that familiar figure; behind him the man in the checkerboard suit.

"Humbolt—" I staggered back.

CHAPTER VII

Torture

A SATISFIED grin spread across Boss Humbolt's heavy jowled face and the grin seemed to spread to the hawk-like features of his aide, Joe. The latter slipped an automatic from his shoulder holster, leveling it at us.

* This may be getting too close to home for publication, but in June, 1940, the FBI uncovered a secret western army similar to the one above. It was known as the U. S. Police Reserve. It was headed by one A. Dinnley. The FBI arrested Dinnley after discovering an arsenal in a Los Angeles warehouse containing \$80,000 worth of munitions and guns.—Ed.

"Where do you think you're going—freak?" he sneered at me.

I could feel my blood boil at the insult. I also noticed Hodar's fists clench and unclench spasmodically. I threw my friend a warning glance, then looked up at Humbolt.

"You're too late, Humbolt," I spoke evenly. "Too damn late. We know your game. You aren't stopping us now! The dead man inside there,"—I nodded toward where Sheriff Stockton's body reposed—, "just talked."

"Shut up!" Humbolt growled.

"Boss Humbolt—front man for the Confederate Western States," I laughed sarcastically. "You and your razor-nosed gunman. Do you think you can stop me? You're small time stuff, that's what." I spoke coldly, smoothly, egging both men on with insult after insult, drawing their attention upon me and away from Hodar.

Suddenly I flashed Hodar a quick meaningful glance. At the same instant I bowled toward Humbolt's legs. The paunchy one was so taken by surprise that he stood there until my full weight (and on Earth I weigh just double what I do on Mars) crashed across his knees, carrying him to the floor in a grunting heap.

Humbolt's aide turned his gun on me, pumping hot lead at short range. The slug staggered me, bit into my flesh like mosquitoes or ricocheted into the adobe walls of the jailroom. Indifferent to bullets as only I can be, I leaped upon Humbolt's paunch, blasting the last ounce of wind out of him.

From the corner of my eye it was clear that Hodar hadn't wasted time. His agile foot came up, kicked the gunman's weapon from his hand. Humbolt's aide let out a howl of pain and backed away, snarling like a trapped wolf.

"You guys could never fight without

guns," Hodar shouted as he plunged after the man, his fists beating the other's face with a swift tattoo of sharp blows.

"Go to it, Hodar," I yelled while holding down Humbolt who struggled feebly beneath my compact bulk.

Then there was a sickening crack. Hodar's fist seemed to sweep up suddenly. It connected with Joe's paper thin jaw. The latter's jaw literally crumbled and the man half turned and slumped to the floor, a groaning heap of bones and flesh.

Hodar turned to me with a boyish grin. "Almost felt like *papier maché*," he said.

"This is no time for jokes," I snapped. "Let's tie them up and put them in a cell. We've got work to do. We've got to figure out some way of stopping those Indians before they massacre the Government cavalry in Echo Canyon."

HODAR and I returned to the livery stable and procured a fast little pinto and a strawberry roan. As Hodar mounted his horse he glanced at me in a disturbed manner.

"Now that we've got Humbolt locked up in a cell, you still aren't at the bottom of this case. Humbolt's only a front man."

"Right," I said. "But if we can stop the Indians before they hit Echo Canyon it's going to upset La Cabeza's strategy. Then he might have to expose himself."

"But how in the hell are you going to stop a whole Indian nation that has amnesia?" Hodar asked. "You can't argue with them."

Reining my pinto toward the edge of town, I put my brain to work. That's the beauty of a Martian brain: it tackles a problem directly, unimpeded by excess thoughts which so muddle

average Earth brainmen. In a short space of time I had completely reviewed the Indian background and its inter-relationship with the medical background of amnesia. Then I considered it in relationship with the drugs administered to the Indians. How does one get amnesia? What gives an entire Indian tribe racial amnesia?

Suddenly I snapped my fingers. From the sparkle in my eyes anyone could tell that I at last had the solution.

"*Dynamite!*" I shouted to Hodar.

"*Dynamite?*" Hodar asked in a stunned voice.

"Yes. We'll let the Indians ride into the canyon. Then, when they're all inside we'll dynamite!" I answered enthusiastically.

Hodar stared at me as if I were crazy. His face had gone pale and his lips moved disconcertedly.

"That's mad, Oscar," he cried. "You can't use dynamite on a thousand Indians—that's worse than murder!"

"I'm handling this," I said. "It's the only way. We're playing against big odds." I spurred my horse to a gallop until we came to the railroad siding just beyond the town. Then, to Hodar's bewilderment, I rode back and forth along the tracks until I spotted what I wanted—a padlocked box marked **DANGEROUS EXPLOSIVES**.

"Keep a weather eye that no one bothers us," I ordered Hodar. Meanwhile I dismounted and shot the padlock away with my rifle.

For the next few minutes Hodar and I were busy splitting the dynamite stick into small packets, none really large enough to cause any real material damage. Some of the packets we manufactured were no larger than a human thumb, others were as large as a teacup.

"Now the fuse," I said.

Hodar's astonishment continued to grow as my plan began to evolve. By joining normal discharge fuses in a series we finally had a tremendously long fuse, perhaps a thousand yards in length. The little bags of dynamite were attached at intervals until they looked like clothes pins on a line.

"This isn't going to do any good," Hodar murmured. "You haven't got enough TNT in one place to rattle my teeth."

"Hang on a while," I smiled as I wrapped the dynamite fuse in a coil, looped it over my saddle horn, mounted and again spurred my pinto across the sage covered slopes.

FOR a while both Hodar and I were silent as we drove our horses into the blinding sunlight of the west. We were both intent upon reaching Echo Canyon before the Indians. We had to if we were to succeed.

I had already learned of a short cut to the canyon through a region called Trigger Gulch. Ten minutes later we swerved into the Gulch and urged our mounts on at breakneck speed. The horses stumbled through the rocky terrain, their hides breaking into a matted sweat because of the difficult going. Behind us, a tell-tale cloud of dust trailed our heels.

It was that dust which brought trouble—trouble that looked like the end of our trail. As we rode into a rimrock basin at the butt end of the Gulch my pinto suddenly sniffed and rippled his brown hide.

I pulled up abruptly, my eyes scanning the rocky basin intently.

"What is it?" Hodar asked, reining in beside me.

I shook my head. I could see nothing, no sign of danger. The red dust basin was quiet as death. The only

visible signs of motion were the rising shimmering heat waves rippling above the rocks.

"Git along, dogie," I growled at the pinto.

Again the pinto rippled his brown coat, flattened his ears and shied. As I spurred him on into the basin he began to sniff uneasily, to dance. Then something clicked in my brain—a warning that had come to my own tulip nose.

"Back, Hodar!" I shouted excitedly.

I reined the pinto back on his hind legs, grabbing at the Remington in the saddle holster. Spurring around in a semi-circle I began pumping lead at the rocks in the basin.

Hodar spurred to my side.

"What's up, Oscar?" he shouted above the gun roar.

In answer, an arrow sang over our heads, the shaft splintering against a rock outcrop behind us. I saw a feathered war bonnet pop out from behind a rock. My gun barked at the gaudy feather and the weirdly painted face beneath it.

Bullets and arrows mingled their deathly songs in the air around us. Then the Hopis, aware of their discovery, came into view. By then it was too late for Hodar and me to make track. A dozen lithe Indians appeared from behind the rocks as if by magic. With wild war whoops and shrieks they surrounded our mounts, grabbing for our legs to drag us from the horses.

I brought my Remington down on one skull, covering an eagle feather bonnet with blood before I found myself jerked to the earth and pinned down by a score of arms. Hodar had already been overpowered.

"Looks like we're never going to use that dynamite," he called hopelessly.

"Ugh—" that was all I could say for a bronzed arm was clamped across my mouth.

The Indians didn't waste time. They captured our horses and started off for a little arroyo that flushed into the basin a few hundred yards to the right. They seemed to be in an awful hurry, as if they had business to attend. When we were dragged into the wash I saw the kind of business.

"Good Lord!" Hodar gasped. "Torture!"

ABRUPTLY, I sucked in my breath. Although I am a complete stranger to fear because I have such perfect control over my adrenal or fear glands, I was shocked myself. The sight of three stakes surrounded by firewood hardly upset me. What really did me in was the person tied to the center stake—Alice Stockton!

In a moment the Indians had Hodar and me tied to stakes, one on each side of Alice. Then they danced around while one of their number, the Medicine Doctor, touched a firebrand to the dry brush encircling our feet.

I could feel the flames crawling upward as I glanced toward Alice Stockton. She smiled tiredly—the bravest girl I've ever seen. Even a burning death at the stake failed to shake her courage.

"Looks like every time I see you, Oscar, I'm tied to a stake—sort of a profession," she smiled bitterly.

"Good God! This is the end!" Hodar cried. "These damn savages! What's wrong with them?"

Alice Stockton winced for the flames were now licking at her legs. I turned my eyes away for I couldn't bear to see the girl suffer.

"Why all the rush to get rid of us?" Hodar growled.

"They want to join the main war-party at Echo Canyon," I answered while at the same time struggling with my bonds.

Suddenly, a huge buck of an Indian dancing in the circle around us, leaped through the flaming brush toward me. In his hand flashed a long wicked scalping knife. The Indian grabbed my head, twisted it to one side. I felt my blood run cold. *I was to be scalped!* I could almost feel the cold blade!

What came next had me dizzy, it occurred so fast. Another Indian, a lean gangling brave dove through the flames, flashing a knife above Alice Stockton. The girl's nerve finally broke and she screamed in terror. I didn't blame her.

Then, strangely, the second brave's knife, instead of slashing across the girl's skull, flashed downward cutting the thongs holding her wrists and legs. At the same moment, in blurred motion the lanky brave jerked a pistol from his buckskin breeches and fired short range at the Indian threatening me.

Suddenly I felt my hands free! The big Indian fell at my feet, his bronzed flesh searing with an ugly odor upon the live flames destined for me.

CHAPTER VIII

La Cabeza Gets Away—Almost

BULLETS rattled into the reddish soft soil. A circle of hot lead poured among the Indians who had danced around us a moment before. I saw angry gun muzzles poking behind rocks and ridges. Shrieks of baffled fury rang out from among the Indians as they faced the surprise hail of lead.

I stared from the hills and rocks to the lanky Indian who had so amazingly released Alice, Hodar and me. He pumped slugs from double six shooters at the few Indians who were still able to run for cover. Once he wiped the sweat off his brow, then I stared, even more startled. The skin on his forehead, no longer bronzed, showed white!

"The Colorado Kid—" I yelled above the gun roar.

The Kid flashed me an excited smile and again turned his attention to his death spewing guns.

A handful of Indians, survivors of the surprise attack swiftly fell back among the rocks in the arroyo. A couple of them knelt to shoot with their outmoded bows and arrows. Dust and flesh searing lead drove them back again.

The Colorado Kid reloaded his guns, fired from both hips, dropping one red-skin after another. Then the remaining braves made a break for it, running with unmatched speed toward their horses. A second later the wild warriors leaped to the backs of their blanketed mustangs and swirled off through the torturous bends up the arroyo.

The Colorado Kid turned toward us, grinning.

"Guess we shooed 'em," he drawled.

I glanced at his strange attire: bronze tinted bear grease covered his handsome face, chest and arms. He wore an elaborate Indian warbonnet covering his sandy hair. His lanky legs were encased in fringed buckskin pants, loose around the bottoms.

The Kid looked at himself, then at Alice.

"Had to rig myself up like this," he said. "Had to get near enough to get you free. I wasn't sure if Tabor would show up in time. But I wasn't counting on Oscar and Hodar getting caught too."

Alice Stockton smiled, saying nothing. But she stood so close to the Kid that his arm went around her shoulders in a most unnoticeable manner.

Tom Tabor rode up with a couple of men who were busily cleaning the dust from their hot rifles as they came. Big Tom looked relieved that none of us were hurt.

"Nice work, Kid," he nodded. "My boys just got themselves in position when you started the fireworks." He turned to Alice. "It's been pretty hard on you, child. I think you'd better get back to the ranch and rest."

"Thanks, Mr. Tabor," Alice smiled. "I'm staying with the Colorado Kid. I'll go back when he does."

The Kid grinned happily but shook his head.

"You'd better go back with Tom," he said. "I ain't very human looking with this warpaint on and anyway I guess Oscar and I have a middlin' job to finish."

The girl shook her head vehemently and stood even closer to the Kid. Meanwhile Tabor frowned upon us.

"We'd better all go back," Oscar included. He spoke gruffly. "This country's no longer safe for a white man to be roaming around in. The Indians are closing in on Echo Canyon pronto. We'd better be moving to safer ground."

I glanced at the sun. The U. S. Cavalry unit was due to come through Echo Canyon before sunset. There was less than an hour left.

"Let's go," I snapped. "We'd better all go to the Canyon."

TABOR sat stiffly upon his horse. The men behind him muttered among themselves in a surly tone.

"Are you crazy?" Tabor stared at me.

"You're safer there than here," I countered.

"We're going to the ranch," Tabor growled. "I'm not trusting Alice to any of your harum-scarum adventures. We're going where it's safe. Them Indians will be in the canyon in no time."

"Listen, Tabor! You heard what Oscar said," The Colorado Kid's cool, slow drawl came from my right.

"It's mad!" Tabor answered.

The big ranchman's eyes flickered toward the Kid's lean hands which rested ominously on his gun butts. Tabor hesitated a second, finally he shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he growled. "I'm not afraid, but I think it's crazy. The canyon is no place for a girl."

I rounded up my pinto where the Indians had hobbled him and spun into the saddle. The coil fuse and hanging packets of dynamite were still untouched. With our time narrowing down to a point where the odds were fifty to one against us having time to work out my plan, I spurred the pinto ahead until the creases on his flanks looked like a railroad team-track network.

Hodar rode beside me. Tabor and his men swung in behind while the Colorado Kid and Alice Stockton brought up our rear. I guided the swift pinto back through the trail across the red dust basin until we came to a fairly level chaparral covered spread. Here we gave the horses their head and raced against the dying sun until our mounts were fairly staggering under the pace.

At last we skirted the rim of Echo Canyon, a yawning gash of torturous bends and sheer sandstone cliffs and escarpments that stretched a couple of dozen miles to the Southwest.

"Where are you going to plant the stuff—along the rim?" Hodar asked. "You haven't got enough dynamite packed in one bundle to budge a rock."

"We're going down." I pointed out a steep trail, a series of sharp-edged rock ledges of eroded red stone cut by wind and water into steps.

The pinto skillfully picked his sliding, halting way down the rubble and shale descent. The trail covered a quarter of a mile and we lost the direct sunlight once we reached the level,

grassy floor of the canyon.

Tabor rode alongside me as I began uncoiling the dynamite fuse.

"Listen," he said desperately. "We've got to get out of here. The Indians will be charging through here any minute. There're thousands of them and they're fighting mad. They've got amnesia! Come on, let's get out!"

"Oscar, you are nuts," Hodar cut in. "If you're going to use dynamite in here the canyon wall will cave in and trap us as well as the Indians."

"Dynamite the walls?" Tabor looked positively frightened for a man of his size. His skin turned pale, then green. He glanced from side to side, searching for an avenue of escape. Then he began shouting like a maniac, his heavy voice scaling to a uncontrolled pitch. "God, Man!" he screamed. "Let me out of here. I ain't going to die. Not me!"

"Quiet!" I yelled.

Tabor sobered up for a moment.

"Listen," I said coolly. "You're not going to get hurt. I'm handling this. You people just keep close to me and keep quiet for a couple of minutes. I've got a job to do."

I SLID off my pinto for a minute, imbedded the tail-end fuse of my dynamite line between a couple of rocks. Then, for the next ten minutes I zigzagged here and there across the canyon, from one wall to the other. Each time I stopped I yodeled in a way that would put any Alpine mountaineer to shame.

Tabor, Alice, the Colorado Kid and even Hodar followed me with growing anxiety. Occasionally I saw them looking at me askance, as if to say, "Little man, the last two days have been too much for you, you need a psychiatrist."

Despite their troubled glances, I trailed the dynamite fuse behind me

and whenever I came to what looked like a good spot I puffed up my lungs, tilted up my nose like a trumpet, opened my mouth and warbled—Y-Y-YOOO-D-D-DEE-I-I-OOOEE-OOO-oooo!

I listened for a return on my yodel. The quavering sound rattled through the canyon, bouncing from wall to wall, reverberating loudly, finally bouncing back upon me from one of the abrupt angles in the sheer escarpments of the canyon.

At the length Hodar broke under the strain.

"Man alive, Oscar," he cried. "This is no time for comedy!"

For an answer I yodeled again, listened and buried another portion of my dynamite. Then I scrambled up the side of the canyon wall like a mountain goat and deposited the last of my TNT.

"A neat job, well done," I announced as I returned to the group. "That dynamite is planted all over the place. Wait until you hear it!" I glanced toward the southwest end of the canyon, half expecting to see an Indian war bonnet pop up behind each rock and bend.

"Tabor—" I heard Alice Stockton's warning voice and spun around to find myself gazing into the muzzle of Tom Tabor's rifle. Tabor's silent men, already on their horses behind their boss, had the Colorado Kid, Hodar and the girl covered with their six-guns.

"Tom Tabor," Alice cried. "Put those guns down. What do you mean?"

Tabor ignored the girl, turned to one of his riders, issuing a clipped order.

"Ride down away, Hank. Give us the signal when the Indians come through."

Then the ranchman turned toward me, scowling.

"I don't know how you're going to stop those Indians with that TNT you

planted," he said. "Maybe it might work. Maybe it won't. But I'm not taking any chances. Those Indians have got to come through. You're never going to touch off that fuse."

Although the Colorado Kid, Alice and Hodar gasped over the little speech they heard, it hardly disturbed me. I knew Tabor was going to come out in the open, making that little confession sooner or later—but *I didn't expect him to have the upper hand.*

"So you're La Cabeza?" the Colorado Kid asked coldly. "The murderer of Sheriff Stockton."

ALICE STOCKTON stared at the Kid and stifled a sudden scream. The Kid threw his arm protectively around the girl's slim shoulders, saying, "It's all right, Alice, I'll even that score up yet."

"Stockton!" Tabor grunted indifferently. "I've never killed a man. Who's going to prove it?"

"You never kill," I interrupted. "You just give the orders. You had Stockton murdered. Then you had the Governor murdered and Hodar framed on that count because you thought he was a little too dangerous to have around when you were getting your secession movement going, eh?"

Tabor scowled darkly.

"You know too much, eh?" he growled.

"That's what I thought," I snapped back.

The ranchman glanced up the canyon where his rider had disappeared. He turned toward us with a satisfied leer on his heavy face.

"Okay, partners," he said. "You've just got time to say your prayers. Those Indians are coming through this canyon and you aren't going to be alive to tell about it."

Alice Stockton stepped in front of

the Colorado Kid and faced Tabor, staring at him angrily.

"You wouldn't shoot us, Tom Tabor!" she cried. "Not in cold blood!"

Tabor swept the girl's trim figure with a frank appraising glance.

"I'm not shooting anybody," he grinned brazenly. "Maybe you want to join up with me. I've got room for a partner. As for your friends, I'm not killing them—the Indians will!"

Alice moved closer to the Kid, a look of stark horror framing her face.

"Why, you—you—"

Her words remained unsaid, for Tabor's rider came galloping up the canyon, lashing his mare at fever heat. Meanwhile another more ominous sound clashed in my ears—the beat of thousands of hoofs mingled with the blood chilling war cries of as many crazed Indians.

The Indians had seen the lone rider. They had mistaken him for an out-rider attached to the U. S. Cavalry unit and instead of waiting in ambush were charging madly down the canyon. Tabor's horseman clattered past us, shouting,

"They come, the whole damn bunch of 'em. Git going!"

Instantly Tabor whirled his own horse, spurring it toward our mounts which were grazing a dozen yards away. He plunged in their midst, fired a few shots and stampeded the horses. I started to run—but too late. We had to stay now and face the raging Indians. Our horses were gone. That was Tabor's revenge. He didn't have to kill us—he left that for the Indians.

The Colorado Kid's right hand blurred toward his holster. Then his gun seemed to bark and smoke before the barrel had even cleared the leather. A hundred yards ahead Tom Tabor's arms jerked skyward. His body stiffened in the saddle as the horse plunged

on, then toppled over backward, crashing to the canyon floor in a broken heap.

"That was for the sheriff—right through the heart!" The Kid spoke. Then he turned to Alice, Hodar and me. "Git up toward the canyon wall," he said. "I'll stand 'em off as long as I can."

He flopped on his stomach, settled himself behind a little knoll waiting for the Indians. He was cool and nerveless as he twirled the barrels of his Colts looking to their loading.

An arrow throbbed through the air and stabbed into the hillock beside the Kid. An eagle feather bobbed from behind a rock down the canyon. The Kid's gun kicked. Where the eagle feather had been a bronzed arm reached upward, fingers clutching at the rock. Behind it an Indian brave twitched in death spasm.

A MOMENT of silence followed, then suddenly human hell broke loose. Thousands of Indians brandishing spears, bows and firing antiquated guns, charged through the gorge. Those on foot leaped over rocks, fired at us from perilous vantage points up the escarpment of the canyon.

Horsemen thundered toward us breaking the clatter of wild mustang hoof beats with blood curdling war cries. The mixed Hopis, Apaches and Zuni warriors rode like mad men, without saddle or bridle, guiding their horses with the pressure of bare bronzed legs. Their half naked greased bodies flashed in the dying sunlight like some fantastic scene taken out of the past.

The Colorado Kid's guns spat lead and fire like mad. The savages ahead came on in waves, indifferent to the Kid's precise aim. Horsemen came on half circling us. Other sinewy figures

flitted swiftly from rock to rock, hurried by the Kid's whistling gunshots.

"Good Lord," Hodar shouted despairingly. "We're gonners. The Kid can't stop them."

"Get back!" yelled the Kid grimly.

Amidst the wild shouts of the Indians as they rapidly rode upon us, I heard another sound—the clear call of a bugle echoing up the canyon.

"The Government Cavalry!" I shouted.

"They're riding right into the trap," hissed the Kid. "We ain't got time to warn them."

The main body of attacking Indians were now less than a couple of thousand yards down the canyon. The entire tribe was in the Canyon—just what I wanted. Meanwhile the Kid's capable guns were holding off the advance riders.

Suddenly I ran to the Kid, shouting, "Stop fire! We don't want to kill anymore. Let me handle the Indians now."

The Kid glared at me in astonishment.

"Think you can talk 'em out of scalping us?" he said satirically.

"Stop firing!" I shouted.

Then, to everyone's sheer amazement I grabbed a gun and raced like mad across the floor of the canyon—toward the oncoming warriors.

"Oscar!" Hodar shouted in a frenzied voice.

CHAPTER IX

Synthetic Shock

I COULD have done better with a pinto, but I ran as fast as I could despite the frantic shouts from Hodar and the Colorado Kid. Maybe they didn't know what I was doing, but I did. I had to reach the end of my dynamite fuse before the Indians. It

was touch and go for a few seconds.

The main line of redskins thundered up, their horses shaking the earth under me with throbbing hoofs. Finally I reached the dynamite line. Even then I realized my chances of success were slim. I had been working on a hunch that I could stop those Indians. Would it end their racial amnesia?

I knew that amnesia was the result of a shock. The redskins as a whole had been shocked into amnesia by an administration of *Tincture Argalli spicati Colorado* and Epinephrine. The latter, when given in overdoses, acts upon the adrenal glands, giving the entire nervous system a tremendous shock.

Could I shock them back to normal by jarring their nervous systems externally—with dynamite?

I held my breath and almost prayed as I lit the tail end of my fuse. The line sputtered, hissed like a live snake. The trail of fire and smoke slithered along. Then it hit the first dynamite packet, a small one.

Boom! The earth and dust bloomed into the air. The noise of the explosion echoed in the canyon. An instant later packet number two went up. BOOM! The rocks along the canyon wall reverberated.

I raced back to my friends shouting orders hoarsely. "Down, for God sakes, lay down! Flat on your stomachs!"

I saw the Kid drag Alice Stockton down, then I flopped beside Hodar. And just in time. Hell really broke loose in the canyon. The powder fuse ripped along now, touching off packet after packet of dynamite, each one larger than the other, from one sheer escarpment to the other.

The earth trembled and rumbled around us as the charges blasted skyward. Detonation after detonation,

enormous concussions of sound banged from wall to wall along the canyon until the air seemed to be just a solid mass of convulsive deafening sound.

My ear drums pained me almost to a point of madness while the swirling, tortured air rushed above us. The exploded dynamite packets built up toward a tremendous, earth shaking crescendo, the blasts echoing, reechoing and magnifying from the canyon walls.

The noise was so terrific Hodar just gasped and stared at me. Then gradually, like thunder muffling in the skies after a storm, the sound and fury subsided.

"Look," the Kid suddenly shouted. "The Indian attack has stopped dead in its tracks!"

HODAR, the girl and the Kid gazed up the canyon. The looks on their faces were those of absolute unbelief. Hodar shook his head as if he doubted his senses.

The redskins were standing around, looking very bewildered, like people waiting in a dentist's office. The concussion had blown most of them from their mustangs but no one appeared injured. They milled around in little groups, not quite able to understand why they were in Echo Canyon or why they were wearing war paint, war bonnets and carrying arms.

A small war party of Sioux from Colorado's Mesa Verde Reservation sat on rocks and wept in a taciturn Indian manner because they were so far from home. Not one seemed to remember what had happened during the last few days.

"Oscar, how'd you know the dynamite would shock them back to normal?" Hodar asked.

"The echo," I said. "I had to devise a tremendous shock to overcome the amnesia, particularly three generations

of it. I figured if Echo Canyon had any echoes in it, they'd build up the dynamite explosions loud enough so I wouldn't have to explode the stuff in dangerous sizes. I didn't want all the Indians killed. They're the only 100 per cent Americans in this country. The rest of us are just patriots."

The clatter of galloping horses stopped any further word I might have to say on Americanism for the real first line defenders of the country came up in the body of the U. S. Cavalry Unit. A trim young officer dropped from his horse and saluted us.

"Captain Fort, U. S. Cavalry," he said. He glanced toward the subdued Indians who were now busily setting up a peaceful camp in the canyon against nightfall. "What's happened to the Indians? They're quiet now."

The Colorado Kid paused a moment to undo his arm from around Alice Stockton's waist. He then introduced us to the Captain who was apparently a friend of his and explained in brief what had happened.

"So you got Tabor?" said the Captain. "I rounded up his men as they came through the canyon." Then he turned to me with a smile and a handshake that was easily worth two Congressional Medals. "What gave you the idea Tom Tabor was behind all this?" he asked.

I PREENED myself pardonably, saying, "My nose—eighty per cent credit goes to my Martian nose. My brain did the rest. It was so simple it sounds complicated."

"Come on, Oscar, get down to facts," Hodar interrupted.

"It was simple," I repeated. "First of all, Sheriff Stockton fell into some information about the secession plot and this business of starting race riots by doping the Indians. He went to see

Tabor the day of the rodeo. Maybe he knew Tabor was involved. Maybe he didn't."

"If the Sheriff didn't know about Tabor," the Colorado Kid interrupted helpfully, "Tabor was still worried that Stockton knew too much anyway."

"So he was murdered," I said. "Perhaps Greco fired that arrow so it would look like Indians. It doesn't matter. Then, when the Indian, Bill Running Wind, rode into the ranch and went berserk, hit by racial amnesia, only Tabor and I were there. That was when I smelled the first inkling of the plot. The Indian had just drunk some water. It was doped . . .

"Meanwhile Hodar had gone into town to meet the Governor. Greco went along on Tabor's orders. They had seen Hodar foil the lynch mob only a few minutes earlier and thought he was too dangerous. At that time Tabor still figured I was a freak and not too important. So they framed Hodar on the charge of murdering the Governor . . . Greco pulled that murder!"

I paused a moment, fussing in my pocket, finally pulling out the wad of powder burned paper that had dropped from Greco's holster.

"Here's the proof," I said.

Captain Fort glanced at the paper oddly. "That doesn't look like anything," he said.

"It doesn't!" I snapped. "Well, Greco wrapped this wadding around a .32 caliber shell, the kind Hodar used in his gun, so that he could fire the bullet from his .44. If you don't believe it's possible to fire a small caliber shell from a larger gun ask any ballistic expert, or try it yourself."

Hodar looked at me and sighed, "Thanks, pal!"

"When the Colorado Kid and I went to the Reservation after we heard Boss Humbolt arousing the people to race

riot (and by the way, Captain, you can pick up the boss in Cell 3, Caxton jail) we were really in the case.

"I discovered the drug formula Tabor used to induce racial amnesia in the Indians. He had agents on all the Reservations dishing it out. All part of his network. I tried it on a dog. The dog got amnesia, being bounced back to where he was nothing more than a wolf.

"By this time, Tabor was getting worried about me," I continued. "He sent bloodhounds out to trail me. Well, the hounds might have torn me to pieces if they hadn't realized that I was their hero, Oscar of Mars. That made me suspicious of Tabor. He tried to say he sent the dogs after Alice. If he had, they would have passed me up with a business-like nod because I myself was on Alice's trail."

Even now the Colorado Kid looked doubtful.

"That ain't much grounds for suspicion," he said. "Considering your nose and what hound dogs think of it."

"Yes," I replied. "But then we really started tying Tabor in. After we captured Boss Humbolt and got all the evidence on the secession plot Tabor began exposing himself. He tried to keep us from the canyon when you rescued us from the Indians. He wanted the cavalry unit smashed. Then at the canyon he lost his head, thought he was trapped there and let it slip when he said, '*They've got amnesia. Come on, let's get out!*'"

"Right then I knew Tabor was La Cabeza. The chief of the secret Western Mounted Reserve was the only one who actually knew exactly what was happening to the Indians—that was Tabor. Then I figured, if we made him think he was cornered in the canyon, he'd admit it himself."

I glanced toward the Colorado Kid

for confirmation of my words, but he was nowhere about. Then I spotted the Kid and Alice Stockton a little ways off, their heads bent together somewhat awkwardly as they watched a new moon rising over the dusky canyon rim like a thin curving fingernail. They didn't fool me—not at all. That was

an Earth ritual—spooning—I think they call it.

“Dad gummit!” I said, slipping into the vernacular of the great open spaces. “Thought for a spell I’d have a chance to run for Sheriff of Sugar Creek and Caxton, but it ’pears like the Sheriff’s daughter is roping a real sheriff.”

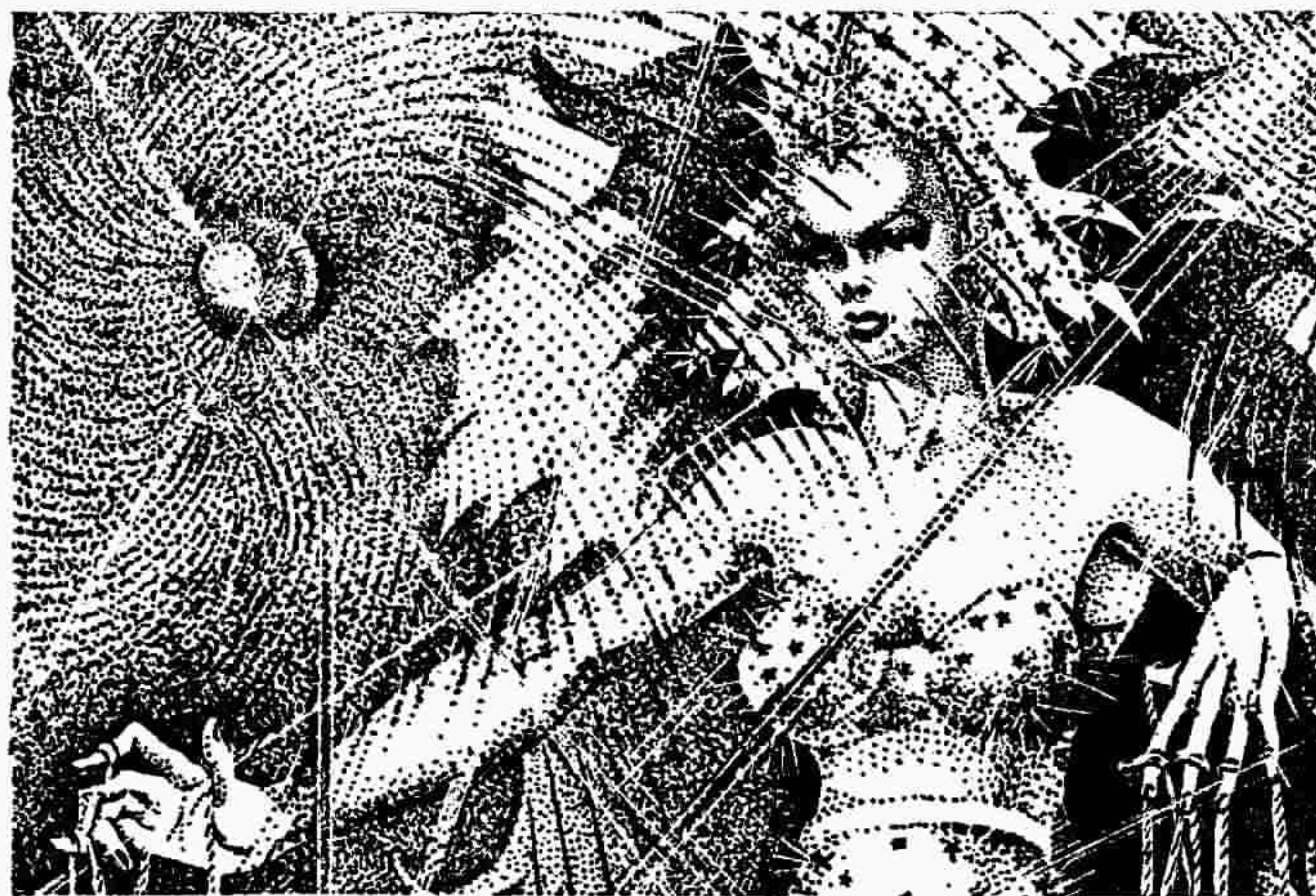
THE WICKEDEST CITY IN THE WORLD

THROUGH the long development of America we’ve had our dangerous, wicked cities. Tombstone in the old days, Chicago in the modern days; but we’ve never produced anything to equal the record established by a city called Irkutsk, in Siberia. Though possessing a population of but one hundred thousand people, it averages two murders a day, rain or shine.

Irkutsk completely eclipses the vaunted wickedness of such lovely little spots as Port Said, Tripoli, or Shanghai. Civil government was so lax for a period that a collection of the most notorious thugs and cutthroats in Europe banded together and took

over the town in the guise of a vigilante movement. For years terror walked the streets of Irkutsk. Merchants who refused to pay their “assessments” were shot down like dogs in the street. The city was bled dry eventually and the “vigilants” moved on to an area where there were more lush pickings.

Whatever climatic or geographic conditions make Irkutsk so susceptible to crime is difficult to say. One thing, however, is sure. Their Chamber of Commerce will have to do miraculous work if they ever want to make a summer vacation-land out of their grim city.



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